

Tear You Apart

Kyra4

Harry Potter

Complete



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Summary

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Description:

DMHG 7th Year. This story carries SERIOUS WARNINGS for dark themes. More specific warnings inside. Draco Malfoy is a bad boy. Draco Malfoy has a bad crush. Draco Malfoy is about to do some very bad things...
COMPLETE

Chapter 1

TITLE: Tear You Apart

WRITTEN TO FULFILL A REQUEST IN THE “CELEBRATE THE SEASON WITH DRACO AND HERMIONE” FIC EXCHANGE. THE LINK TO THE EXCHANGE SITE, WHERE THERE ARE MANY OTHER EXCELLENT DM/HG STORIES TO READ AND ENJOY, IS IN MY PROFILE.

RATING: M(+) for sexual content and a *dark, disturbing theme*.

DISCLAIMER: As usual. All recognizable people and places belong to JK. The only thing that came from me is the plot. And dude. Seriously. It’s pretty twisted.

AUTHOR’S NOTE and WARNINGS: Okay, I know I’m long winded, so bear with me. Or skip if you don’t care about warnings! Thanks to my awesome beta Alex... it’s been a terrible loss to the D/Hr fandom since she jumped ship, but she can always be counted upon to beta for a friend in need! She was also a wonderful sounding board and “consultant” for this story... and gave me valuable reassurance that not *everyone* who reads it will run for the hills convinced that I am a complete sicko... just most people. AND, regards to Amy for the great request! Though I doubt this is what she had in mind... Something about it really ‘spoke’ to me; I started writing the day I received it! Okay— this fic is DARK DARK DARK. There is not an *ounce* of fluff in it; not one ounce. I’m no newbie to writing angst, but I do usually end on a happy note... however, Amy requested an ending that was realistic, not sugar-coated. And I found that removing the expectation of a happily-ever-after ending gave me a surprising amount of freedom to, well, let my dark side run a little rampant. *Some people may find this hard to read*. In places, it was hard to write. As for specific warnings, this fic contains: One-sided attraction, use of an Unforgivable Curse, non-con / coerced sexual situations, sexually explicit content (including aforementioned non-con), and mentions of other pairings, specifically, DM/PP and HG/RW. Some language, including the gratuitous use of the word “mudblood”. Minor character deaths. Oh— and it is *not* HBP compliant— it takes place during Draco and Hermione’s seventh year at Hogwarts, therefore assuming that they *have* a normal(ish) seventh year at Hogwarts, thereby rendering it non-HBP-compliant and so, to a certain extent, AU. And... I think that covers just about everything!

The title references the song “Tear You Apart” by She Wants Revenge. Though this is by no means a songfic, the lyrics to this song were part of what inspired me while writing it. They evoke for me a strange yet powerful sense of tenderness and desire, fused with an almost pathological need to possess and to hurt. Talk about a winning combination ;-)

The request I was assigned to fulfill was as follows:

Rating(s) of the fic you want: A Hard R

Three things you want your fic to include:

The Yule Ball, the color green and lots of angst.

Three things you do not want your fic to include:

A sugary ending (give me something real), glossing over Draco's racist feelings, Hermione trying to fix Draco.

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TEAR YOU APART

XXX

He was staring at her.

Again.

Bloody hell. He hated staring at her— hated that she had that sort of power over him.

Filthy little mudblood.

Stuck up little know-it-all.

Arrogant little Gryffindor.

She was the enemy— no— not *even* the enemy. She *shouldn't* rate in his mind at all. His father had told him recently— drunk on Firewhisky the night of his release from Azkaban— that even enemies deserved respect, so long as they were worthy foes. "Take the Potter boy, for example," Lucius had slurred to Draco's astonishment, inebriated and bitter from his time behind bars, uttering words that would render him, should the Dark Lord ever discover that he'd spoken them, worse than dead — 'Take the Potter boy, son. There's a worthy adversary. Been giving our Lord a run for his money since he was a bloody baby, hasn't he? Got your old man locked up, didn't he? And *you've* certainly never gotten one up on him, have you, boy?' he'd sneered, causing Draco's face to burn with shame. "You mark my words, son," Lucius had continued, after tossing off yet another shot of the strong, flaming liquor, "the day'll come when you and I will stand side by side and spit on that cocky little bastard's grave. But I'll tell you then what I tell you now— he was a worthy foe."

So if he were to give any weight to his father's words— and Draco Malfoy always gave weight to his father's words— even enemies deserved a certain amount of respect. Not enough respect to prevent one from spitting on their graves, but still. Granger, though— she didn't deserve even that. She was so far below him on the scale of wizarding society that she barely qualified as human, for Merlin's sake. Muddy, filthy, disgusting... and he was *staring* at her again.

Goddamn it.

He wrenched his eyes back to his own parchment, furious at her, furious at himself. Furious at his girlfriend, Pansy, who was seated next to him, sharing his desk, and who he knew had been watching him watch Granger— he could feel the disapproval radiating off her in waves. She scooped her chair an inch or so to the right— away from him. Snarling, he grabbed the edge of it and yanked it back toward him, so suddenly and roughly he nearly sent her toppling to the floor. She yelped.

"Is there a problem, Mister Parkinson? Miss Malfoy?" queried Professor Binns in his mild voice, muddling their names as per usual.

“No problem, sir,” Draco gritted out from between clenched teeth. Pansy, beside him, was wisely silent.

Ten minutes later he was staring at her again.

It was almost enough to make a man want to gouge his own eyes out. It was just so *unfair*, damn it all. How was it that this *one girl* embodied everything he wanted physically, and everything he hated intellectually? Had she been put on this earth solely to torture him? Sometimes he thought so. Like now. Binns had stopped talking to shuffle through his notes, and Granger had taken advantage of the momentary pause to clamp her quill between her lips and ruefully massage her right wrist. Then, still holding the quill in her mouth, she used both hands to gather her copious amounts of dark, unruly hair into a loose knot at the nape of her neck.

With her arms raised like that, Draco could clearly see the outline of her nearer breast—small, high, firm— perfect, in other words— tautly sketched against the fabric of her white school blouse. A certain part of his own anatomy leapt to attention in response, straining almost painfully against his trousers. And she still had that bedamned quill in her *mouth*— sucking on it absently, now, as she tucked stray curls behind her ears. It was almost too much to bear— if he didn’t know better he’d think she was doing it intentionally to drive him right the hell out of his mind. He *did* know better, though. She wasn’t thinking about him at all, much less was she aware that she was doing anything the least bit provocative. That was the truly maddening thing; the *innocence* behind it all. That was what he wanted to possess.

That was what he wanted to destroy.

He wanted her right this goddamn minute, bent forward over that desk with her little pleated skirt flipped up, right in front of *everyone*— in front of Pansy, in front of Potter, in front of that pathetic clod Weasley (her *boyfriend*, for fuck’s sake) who was even now leaning over to whisper something in her ear, his hand going with an absentminded possessiveness to the small of her back— wanted her helpless and impaled, with one of his hands holding her by the hip and the other fisted in that incredible, luxurious hair of hers while he rammed into her again, and again, and again. He wanted to make her scream.

He wanted to make her cry, and make her cum, all at once.

Merlin’s balls. He had to get hold of himself before he exploded right here in his pants. Sucking in a ragged, tormented breath, he forced his eyes back to his parchment again. Planting an elbow on his desk, he leaned his forehead into his hand— shading his eyes against the side of the room that Granger occupied. Binns was droning on again. Pansy, sullen, was leaning away from him as far as she could without falling out of her chair. Damn it. Now on top of everything else he’d have to figure out a way to smooth things over with her — and fast, since he was going to want— no, make that *need*— her warm and willing body in the nearest utility closet immediately after class. Well, one thing at a time. Steady— deep breaths. Avoiding the ruination of this particular pair of trousers was the first priority.

God, he wanted Granger so badly he *ached* with it.

And Draco Malfoy *always* got what he wanted.

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He was staring at her.

Again.

Sometimes he tried to pinpoint just exactly when he'd begun looking at the mudblood with new eyes— hungry eyes. But it was difficult to say, precisely. Probably since midway through sixth year, if he had to come up with a date... that was when he had started to realize that there were real curves under those robes, and something quite intriguing about that thick, wild hair. Something that made him want to plunge his hands deep into it— inhale it— *pull* on it.

It went farther back than that, though. If he were to be honest with himself— and he was, occasionally, at least— he'd have to admit that it went all the way back to the Yule Ball fourth year. How his jaw had dropped when he'd seen her float into the room on the arm of Quidditch superstar Victor Krum. He'd hardly been able to take his eyes off her that night.

Merlin help him, he'd hardly been able to take his eyes off her *since*.

He wondered idly what she would wear to this year's ball, a scant two weeks away. Those blue robes she'd worn three years ago had certainly suited her. Of course, he found it ridiculous that there was to be a ball this year at all— traditionally the Yule Ball was associated with the Triwizard Tournament— and there was no tournament this year. There was not likely to be a tournament again in the foreseeable future, for that matter, considering Cedric Diggory's death during the last one. Draco snorted. Hufflepuff idiot. Deserved everything he'd gotten, that one had.

But as to this year's ball— it had been decided by the Hogwarts administration that some sort of event was in order to raise spirits at the school; student morale was at an all-time low, as attacks were increasing and it was becoming obvious that the wizarding world was gearing up for a full-scale war. And since there had been such a positive response to the last Yule Ball, it was settled upon that a new one would be just what was needed to breathe a little life back into the student body.

Well, Draco would be there. With Pansy on his arm. The perfect, pureblooded couple. And while Pansy fluttered and simpered about, making sure every single person there was aware of her expensive, custom-made new robes and her status as the date of the wealthiest pureblood in the school, he would be at his leisure to drink in the physical perfection that was Hermione Granger in dress robes.

He hoped they'd be low cut.

It was enough to shake a man's faith in the existence of God, when one came right down to it. If there was indeed a God, then why, *why* would he create something that was at once so lovely and so inferior, so impure? It didn't make sense. It was a tragedy— a travesty. Creation gone wrong.

She was so *dirty*.

She was so beautiful.

He wanted her so damn much.

She was coming this way.

He was lounging at a table in the Three Broomsticks with Crabbe and Goyle on this, the last Hogsmeade weekend before the Christmas holiday— enjoying the hard-won peace and quiet he had gained by leaving Pansy at the swankiest robe shop in town with five hundred of his galleons in her purse. He'd followed the Golden Trio in here with a mind to enjoy half-an-hour or so of Granger-watching, without the nuisance of having to lend one ear to his girlfriend's incessant prattling, or worry about her cottoning on to what he was doing. Crabbe and Goyle were the perfect companions for this particular exercise— as long as he kept the Butterbeer and pub food coming, they remained too busy eating and drinking to say a word— let alone look up from their plates— leaving Draco to the company of his own thoughts.

The trio, plus the Weaselette, had taken a table near the back of the pub. Draco and his cronies, who had come in after them, had taken the only one left in the crowded establishment — just inside the front door. The drawback was that there was a draft every time the door opened. But the advantage was that Hermione would have to pass within inches of him when she left the pub. And— this was far better than he'd even dared hope for— she was leaving now, and *alone*.

Draco had watched her lean in close to Ron, reaching up to cup his cheek in her gloved palm as she spoke quietly into his ear. He'd smiled and nodded at her words without giving her his full attention— he'd been half focused on something Harry, seated on his other side, was saying. She'd then pressed a swift, chaste kiss to his lips and stood— and now she was making her way directly toward him, alone and unprotected, none of her tablemates making any move to follow.

It was a golden opportunity, and he decided in a flash to take it. Reaching under his cloak, he pulled out a small sack of galleons and slapped it down in the middle of the table. "Wait here. I'll be back," he told Crabbe and Goyle, whose piggy little eyes were riveted on the money bag. He wouldn't need to worry about them following him, not so long as the money held out, anyway. And the fifty or so galleons that were in that bag would be good for a *lot* of Butterbeer. Waiting until Granger had passed him, almost near enough to touch, he swung himself out of his chair and followed her out the door.

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It was snowing outside. The cold hit him like something solid; like a slap to the face. Even so, things were still going his way. The very unfriendliness of the weather worked to his advantage, because there were few people on the street. Those that *were* out and about were hurrying on their way, heads ducked down against the elements; shadowy, indistinct forms behind the curtain of swirling snow. Granger was still close by, though. She'd only just struck off down the street. And in the direction she had taken, Draco happened to know, there was a narrow alleyway between this building and the next.

The situation was almost *too* perfect.

Her earmuffs prevented her from hearing him striding up behind her. In a single, fluid motion, he had her— one arm wrapped around her torso, pinning her arms to her sides, the other hand clamped over her mouth, stifling her startled cry. He yanked her sideways into the alley, taking advantage of her shock to let go of her for just a split second— time enough to pull out his wand. Then he wrenched her around to face him, using his body to pin her against the cold stone wall of the pub.

He could hardly believe she was here— in his arms, at his mercy. It was what he had wanted for *so long*. So very long. He was so close to her their foreheads were nearly touching. Both of them were breathing hard; she from surprise that was quickly turning to fear; he from desire.

Their breaths, quick white puffs in the freezing, snow-filled air, mingled together. Merlin, her breath was sweet. Butterbeer and peppermint.

“Lo, Granger,” he said. And then, “*Imperio*.”

For a long time he said nothing more; just stood there looking at her, drinking her in. She was fighting the curse, he could see it in her eyes; fighting it hard.

It was a losing battle, though.

He had received a good deal of “private tutoring” in the Unforgivable Curses over the summer from his Aunt Bella— and she was among the best of the best when it came to them. She called him her star pupil too, and with good reason— Draco had a natural affinity for dark magic. The Cruciatus was his specialty, but he had no intention of unleashing *that* on Granger... well, not *today*, at any rate. He could whip up a perfectly serviceable Imperius, though, when the situation demanded it, as this particular situation, in his firm opinion, did. (He was, in fact, particularly skilled in a somewhat rare and exceptionally cruel version of the curse, which allowed the victim to retain enough self awareness to realize that she was doing things she *really did not want to do*... yet she could not refuse a direct order given her by the caster of the spell.)

He had Granger in an iron grip, and she was not going to fight her way free of it any time soon. He admired the ferocity with which she was trying, though. He really did. He could almost respect her for it.

Almost.

At the end of the day, though, she was still just a filthy little mudblood, no matter how beautiful or determined. Not fit to be respected by him. It was a shame, really. A bloody shame. If she had been a pureblood, he would have worshipped her.

Ah, well. He could still have his fun with her. She was an inferior creature, fit only to be *used* by her superiors; used and thrown away. And using her promised to be so much fun.

He leaned in closer, until his lips brushed lightly up against hers. “What did you say to Weasley before you left the pub, Granger?” he asked her quietly, his mouth moving against hers as he spoke. “Tell me the truth. Now.”

“I said... I...” she was still fighting his control. She didn’t want to tell him jack. He smiled. His tongue darted out, tracing the curves of her lips, which were trembling with the effort not to speak. He raised a gloved hand to her throat, applied just enough pressure to make her gasp.

“Your fear tastes delicious, Granger,” he murmured. “Now answer my question before I’m forced to hurt you.”

“I said... mmh... that I was going... to buy his Ch-Christmas present— (she was still fighting against every single word that escaped her-) and I’d mmm... meet him back at the

pub in... in twenty minutes.”

“Good girl,” Draco said almost gently. “That wasn’t so hard now, was it? Twenty minutes, is it? Well, that gives us, let’s see... at least ten good minutes to play. Do you want to play with me, Granger?”

Her eyes were swimming with tears by now. She pressed them briefly closed— twin tears spilled over and streaked down her cheeks. “No,” she said.

“But you will, mudblood, if I tell you to. Won’t you?”

“Nnnhh... yes.”

“Good. Now kiss me. Kiss me like you mean it; just as if I were that pathetic, impoverished, *spotted* boyfriend of yours.”

For a long moment she did nothing— biting her own lip, breathing in hard, quick little pants, nearly hyperventilating with the effort to fight off his control. He let her do it, confident that he would win in the end. And he did. She gave it all she had so that when he broke through he broke through completely; her will vanquished in an instant. With a sudden little cry that could have been either passion or despair she literally *threw* herself at him, knocking him backward with the force of it. He fetched up against the opposite wall of the alley, which was fortunately only a few inches away— it was *quite* narrow in here— as she wrapped her arms about him, winding her hands through his snow-dusted hair, and sealing her lips to his with an intensity that caught him off-guard... that was nearly painful... and that he responded to immediately, and fervently.

Merlin, it was incredible. It was everything he had fantasized it would be. Plunging his hands deeply into her lush, dark hair, inhaling the scent of it through his nose even as his mouth was... otherwise occupied... grabbing fistfuls of it, making her cry out, the sound muffled, lost in their kiss.

He could have kissed her like that forever.

But he knew he had only limited time. So he broke the kiss, shoving her abruptly back, hard, against the opposite wall, her head hitting the stone with an audible *thwack*. Breathing heavily, he took her in. She was gasping for breath, her eyes locked on his, now steadily leaking tears. The misery in those dark eyes of hers was exquisite to behold.

“Take off your coat,” he said in a voice hoarse with lust. “Quickly, mudblood. We haven’t much more time.”

Her hands flew to obey him, fumbling with the clasps on the heavy winter garment. There was no more resistance in her body; he’d broken it all down, torn it away. Only her eyes spoke volumes.

The coat unbuttoned, she shrugged it off, letting it fall in the dirty, sludgy snow of the alley. She was wearing a burgundy cardigan sweater beneath it, made of some fabric Draco hadn’t seen before; it must be Muggle in origin, he thought briefly— it looked almost impossibly soft.

She turned her head to the side as he bridged the gap between them once more... but that was all right with Draco; her mouth was not his goal this time. Instead he planted a kiss on

the very edge of her face, right up by her earlobe, then dragged his mouth down along the line of her jaw to her chin— reveling in the salt on her skin, the taste of her tears— and then down her throat until he reached her collarbone.

There, just above where the soft fabric of her sweater terminated, he marked her— sucking hard on the smooth skin until it was an angry red; a love-bite that had nothing whatsoever to do with love. Only desire, and power, and control.

When he straightened up again he saw that she was shaking, now, from head to foot... partly from losing the warmth of her coat, no doubt, but there was more to it than that. It was also shock from the things he had done to her— the things he had made *her* do— and exhaustion from her futile attempts at resisting the curse. He took her chin in one hand, forcing her to look directly at him once more. His other hand wandered down her body with a casual possessiveness; over her torso— the dip of her waist— the curve of her hip— until it came to rest comfortably on the swell of her denim-clad bum. “Tell me you liked that as much as I did, Granger.”

She tried to shake her head, but he was still holding her fast. “*Tell* me,” he said implacably.

“I... I liked... nnnh... *no!*”

Draco raised an eyebrow in surprise. Well, look at that... this girl had reserves of strength he’d never guessed at. He brought more of his will to bear. “Tell me, mudblood,” he whispered.

“I liked— I liked that— nnn... as— as much as you did!” She fought it to the end, and it came out so choked by tears as to be nearly incomprehensible, but it was good enough for him. He smiled.

“All right, Granger. Now you can tell me how you really feel.”

Her voice was a bare, raw whisper. “I hate you, Draco Malfoy. I wish you were dead.”

Draco shook his head, smirking. “Tsk, ts, Granger. That’s not very charitable *at all*. And you’re meant to be such a *nice* girl. Now tell me... would you like me to release you from the spell?

She ground out her answer through clenched teeth. “Yes.”

Draco leaned forward once more, so that his lips were brushing hers just as they had been at the beginning. “Yes what, mudblood?”

“Yes... *please*.”

“Then you have to swear to me that this will stay between us, and you have to keep your promise even after the spell is lifted. Swear to me on your boyfriend’s life, that this will be our little secret, Granger.”

She closed her eyes, sending more fat tears spilling down her cheeks, and sucked in a ragged, hitching breath. She swallowed. “I swear I’ll tell no one. On Ron’s life I swear.”

“Good girl.” He couldn’t resist planting one last kiss on her trembling lips before he stepped back, finally saying, “*Finite Incantatum*.”

He wondered if she would try to slap him or something of the sort; he'd never forgotten—or forgiven—that slap third year... and she certainly had more... *personal*... cause now than she'd had then. But she didn't. In fact, she barely seemed to register him anymore at all. She stayed pressed against the wall for a long moment, as if it were the only thing holding her up; gulping in deep, shuddering, sobbing breaths— then abruptly she slid to her knees and threw up in the dirty snow.

“Well, *that's* insulting,” Draco said mildly, mostly to himself... and left the alley.

He had planned to take a short walk to clear his mind before returning to Crabbe and Goyle at the pub, but somehow he simply couldn't tear himself entirely away from Hermione. She looked so wretched on her knees in the snow that he almost felt a touch of remorse for what he had done.

Almost.

In any event, he retired to a covered doorstep across the street that afforded some protection from the snow, which was falling thicker now, and watched her from the shadows. He would just make sure she got to her feet; got her coat back on. After all, it wasn't as if he wanted the girl *dead*— not today, anyway. Not like this, frozen in a puddle of her own sick in a dirty alleyway. Mudblood or not, she... hell, she deserved better than that. She *had* put up one bastard of a fight. And besides... he wasn't through with her— not by a long shot. No, this little interlude had merely whetted his appetite. Damned if he was going to let anything happen to her until he'd had a go at the main course.

So he waited, and watched the alley across the street. The snow was falling so thickly now that he was no longer able to make her out within it. Minutes passed— he was just about to go back over there to check on her when she finally emerged.

She had her coat back on and buttoned, and her head bowed against the elements; her face was hidden by a curtain of thick, dark hair. She stood there on the sidewalk for a long moment, just outside the alleyway, hugging herself— Draco couldn't tell for sure from this distance, but it looked as if her shoulders were shaking, and hard— in other words, as if she were crying.

This went on for some time— she actually fell sideways against the wall at one point, and raised both her hands to her face, burying it in them. Draco felt an uncomfortable twinge of... something. Over the holidays, while under the tutelage of his father and aunt, and other Death Eaters besides, he had done far worse things than this— this was child's play in comparison. But he'd never hung around before to see the aftermath of the things he had done... and seeing this now was faintly disturbing to him.

But he shook it off. What the hell was she carrying on about, anyway? What had he *done*, really? Coerced a girl to kiss him— so bloody what? There were worse things happening in the world every minute of every day. If mudblood Granger wanted to act the drama queen, let her. If she felt persecuted now, ha— wait until the next time when he didn't stop at a kiss. He'd *give* her something to cry about, right enough.

He turned to leave.

But he still— couldn't— quite— do it.

Against his will, his eyes were drawn back to the girl across the street. He watched as she straightened up a moment later, as she wiped— angrily; almost savagely, it looked to him—at her face with the sleeve of her coat. She disappeared into the pub... and only then was he able to bring himself to walk away.

Chapter 2

(A/N: Okay folks, in this chapter the story begins to really earn all the copious warnings I put at the beginning. This is where things get dark and dirty. There is non-consensual sexual content, coupled with what can only be described as psychological torture. Read at your own risk! This chapter earns a rating of HARD R. Believe it or not, I did actually have to edit it down some to make it, I think, borderline acceptable for this site. There will be one more chapter after this, just FYI; this will be a three-chapter fic in all.)

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He was staring at her.

Again.

It was the day before the Yule Ball.

On the day *after* the Yule Ball he was leaving Hogwarts— going home for the holidays and taking Pansy with him. It was a luxury most students didn't have, leaving after the holidays had begun— The Hogwarts Express had departed a week ago, carrying primarily the younger students who weren't eligible to attend the ball and for the most part, any students who had *not* boarded it would remain at the school until the next term began. Draco, however, was not “most students”. His father was sending private transportation for him and his girlfriend, as this was a major milestone; the first time he was bringing Pansy home to formally meet and spend time with his parents, as his intended. She'd met them many times in the past, of course— the two families moved in the same relatively small and very exclusive social circles— but this would be her first time interacting with them in the context of *probable future daughter-in-law*.

What this all boiled down to, for Draco, though, at the moment was this; he wanted Granger again. He wanted more than a kiss. And he wanted it tonight. If he didn't make his move tonight he'd lose his chance for weeks— and that, he was positive, would bloody well drive him to distraction. She'd been on his mind more or less every minute since their last encounter.

He had heard, later on the day of the Hogsmeade kiss, that Granger had collapsed on the way back to school— that walking up the hill toward Hogwarts between Potter and Weasley, with Weasley's arm wrapped snugly around her waist, her knees had simply and without warning buckled out from under her. Weasley had caught her before she'd hit the ground, reported Millicent Bulstrode, who'd apparently witnessed the whole thing, and had sprinted the rest of the way to the castle with her clasped to his chest, Potter and the Weaselette at his heels, shouting for help even before they'd made it through the front doors. Millicent had been slightly starry-eyed throughout her retelling, as if impressed by this Gryffindor spectacle — and no wonder, Draco thought, disgusted— living vicariously through Granger in this situation was the closest Bulstrode would ever come to having a man show that sort of concern for *her*; beastly thing that she was.

He hadn't seen Granger for over three days after that— word had it she'd been in the hospital wing, having caught one hell of a wicked cold in the village. He'd lived in fear those first few days that she would renege on her promise not to tell... but as time had passed and nothing more had come of it, he'd breathed easy once again. Apparently she was as good as her word.

Typical Gryffindor. Ha.

By the time she'd gotten out of the infirmary, the holidays had begun in earnest... so Draco was no longer able to watch her for much of the day during classes. Which was quite annoying, frankly. He was reduced to watching her surreptitiously at mealtimes, as he was doing right now... except for the odd occasion when he managed to catch a glimpse of her in the castle or on the grounds with her friends. She'd never glanced his way once, but he could hardly fail to notice that she never seemed to walk alone anymore either... and her wand was always close at hand.

He had finally figured out a way to both get her alone and catch her off-guard, though... and had set his plan in motion earlier today. It had come to him in a flash of inspiration at lunch, when he'd bitten into something that had been lukewarm at best, had spat it out in disgust and been just on the verge of launching into a tirade on the subject of damned incompetent house elves... when it had hit him. *House elves*. He knew along with everyone else in the school that they were Granger's pet project and had been for years... house elves were the key to getting at her.

Directly after lunch he had visited the kitchens. There were any number of the bowing, scraping little creatures that would have been pathetically glad to do his bidding— and one that had looked vaguely familiar to him, that had disappeared with a squeak and a pop the second it laid eyes on him. It was a particular elf that Draco was after, however— he had heard many times from different people about Granger's near obsession with one little female who'd apparently been disgraced into wearing clothes... Granger had been trying for years to convince it that it was better off this way; a relentless, misguided campaign that had left the creature more or less permanently traumatized; a nervous wreck. This was the elf that Draco wanted to see.

He had found her in the furthest corner of the kitchen, being given a wide berth by the other elves, who'd been treating her as though she had some horrible and possibly contagious disease. She'd been sitting on the floor and rocking gently back and forth, staring unnervingly into the middle distance with glazed, slightly wild eyes, and hiccupping occasionally. Empty, overturned bottles of Butterbeer littered the floor around her.

Draco had hunkered down in front of her; snapped his fingers impatiently inches from her face. He'd wanted to get this over with as quickly as possible— there were few places he'd less rather be than in the overheated, cabbage-smelling school kitchens, associating with a filthy, *inebriated* house elf. Just *imagine* if anyone he knew could see him now. Still, if it achieved his goal, he would count it more than worthwhile in the end.

"Elf," he'd barked at her. Slowly, her enormous, bulging, half-mad eyes had focused on him.

She'd been as pathetically anxious to please as he'd hoped she would be... once he'd promised her that no, Hermione Granger absolutely, positively, would not be coming to see

her as a result of the favor she did him.

XXX

And now Draco was watching Hermione at the Gryffindor dining table, to see whether or not his plan had come to fruition.

The thing that Draco had been waiting for came with the dessert course. As the main course vanished and the trays of pastries appeared, Draco saw, squinting across the hall, that a piece of folded over parchment had just materialized directly in front of Hermione— where her dinner plate had been mere seconds before.

Potter and Weasley were deep in conversation with one another, Draco noticed, and never even saw her pick up the letter, unfold it, scan it, then refold it and slip it into a pocket of her robes. She said nothing to anyone about it, but Draco, watching, could tell that she was quite suddenly brimming with enthusiastic energy and the will to be gone. And no wonder... she had a mission now. Or at least, he thought, smirking, she *thought* she did.

He stood abruptly and slipped out of the Great Hall himself, confident that she would be only moments behind him. He'd watched the house elf, Weenie or Wanker or something like that, scribble drunkenly on the parchment he'd brought with him to the kitchen, so he knew exactly what was written on Granger's note. That the elf had been doing some serious thinking about everything "Miss Hermione is telling her" over the years— that she was ready to talk to Miss Hermione about it in person— but only if Miss Hermione is coming to see her right after dinner, and alone.

Now all Draco had to do was ambush her on her way to the kitchen.

Things couldn't have gone more perfectly.

He heard the quick, somehow prim little *click click* of her shoes on the flagstone floor less than three minutes after he'd concealed himself in a narrow, dimly lit side corridor; she was alone as the elf's note had requested she be, and as dessert was still fully underway up in the dining hall, there were no other stray students about either.

He grinned. It was... once again... almost too easy. Someone up there was looking out for him... or else really had it in for Granger.

He waited until she'd passed him by before he swung out into the main corridor and thrust his wand hard into the small of her back.

"*Imperio*," he whispered, before she had time to do anything more than stiffen— and then, noticing that, as usual as of late, her own wand was in her hand, added, "lower your wand now, Granger, that's a good girl."

She did so, moving jerkily, once again fighting the curse with everything she could muster. Good— let her get it out of her system now, early on. That would make things all the better, later. Merlin, how he wanted to take her right now... but that wouldn't do. She'd almost certainly told her friends where she was going, and they'd start out to look for her if she didn't rejoin them relatively soon. This little rendezvous was for instructions only— so he'd better cut right to the chase.

He dragged her several feet into the smaller, darker, and less-used corridor, then caught her chin and pulled her around to face him. “You will do everything I tell you to, mudblood, exactly as I tell you to do it. Do you understand?”

“Yes.” There were no tears in her eyes this time... there was murder. If looks could kill, he’d have been a bloody mess splattered all over the floor. This girl had some grit; he found himself grinning again.

“And you will follow my instructions?”

She bit down hard on her lip and squeezed her eyes closed, obviously concentrating, waging a valiant struggle to not give him the answer he wanted to hear.

“Nnnh...” she said, shaking her head in a gesture of negation, her hands clenched into fists at her sides. Draco frowned impatiently. He enjoyed watching her struggle, but there just wasn’t *time*. He brought more of his own willpower to bear, focusing the curse into something which had to be hurting her. This was the most intense he’d ever had to make it... and he’d used it on full-grown men in the course of his “training”. Truthfully, he was blown away by the depth of her resistance. This was mental war.

“Answer me, mudblood. *Will you follow my instructions?*”

A deep shudder wracked her body— her hands opened and closed spasmodically— she dropped her wand. Then she opened her eyes.

What he saw in them now was a desperate unhappiness, and capitulation, and defeat.

“Yes,” she whispered, in a barely audible voice.

Draco allowed himself a satisfied smirk, more relieved than he cared to admit. It had been touch and go for a few seconds there.

“Good,” he said. “Pick up your wand and put it away. You will find your friends and return to your common room. You will act as if nothing is amiss. You will speak as little as you possibly can without arousing suspicion, and will retire to your dorm early. Once your dorm-mates are asleep and your common room is empty you will go to the prefects’ bathroom, and if I am not already there, you will draw yourself a bath and wait for me. Inside the bathtub. Is all of that perfectly clear?”

“Yes.” Her voice was stronger now, but it was dull. Lifeless.

“And you will do all of it?”

“I will do all of it.”

“All right then. I’ll see you again soon, Granger. You may go.”

He let her get a few steps away before calling her back. “Oh... Hermione?” It was the first time he’d used her given name. He said it gently— almost lovingly... but his tone had a sinister quality to it all the same. She stopped, but didn’t turn around.

“Yes?”

He walked up behind her and took her in his arms— one hand snaking into the hair at her temple, fisting in it and tugging— gently but implacably— until she was forced to let her

head fall backward, against his shoulder. His other hand roamed around to the front of her body, slipping beneath the fabric of her turtleneck as it did so, playing over her stomach— it was taut, the muscles trembling— and then up to her breasts, first one and then the other, teasing at her nipples through the silky fabric of her bra. He pushed his body forward into hers, allowing her to feel his erection pressed hard into the small of her back. Her eyes were scrunched closed as tight as she could make them, her breath shallow, rapid, erratic.

“What are you thinking right now, mudblood?” he whispered into her ear.

When she answered, it was through clenched teeth. “That I want to wake up from this nightmare.”

“You know I’m going to fuck you tonight.”

She swallowed hard. “I know.”

“Still you’ll come.”

“I’ll come.”

“Why didn’t you tell anyone about our kiss?”

“I swore. I swore on Ron’s life.”

He chuckled. “And you really believed I’d *kill* him if you told?”

“I wouldn’t put it past you,” she whispered.

“That’s wise of you, Granger. Very wise. You *are* a smart girl, aren’t you? And you would do anything— *give* anything— to protect him?”

“You know I would.”

“Yes, I do believe that. I think you’d come of your own volition, even if I were to lift the curse right now... you’d come to protect your pathetic boyfriend, and for another reason, too... because the truth is, Hermione, that you’re a *dirty* little mudblood and deep, deep down, you actually want this. Your body is betraying you, Granger.” He tweaked one of her nipples, hard, eliciting a shuddering gasp. “This is turning you on. Admit it.”

“Nnhhh-!”

Abruptly he stepped back, breaking all contact and nearly causing her to fall to the floor, suddenly unsupported. “That’s all right, mudblood, I won’t make you say it. Not right now anyway. But I’m sure as hell not lifting the curse, either... better safe than sorry, wouldn’t you agree? Now get the hell out of my sight. I’ll see you in a few hours... Hermione.”

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He was staring at her.

Again.

This time he could look his fill with no fear of discovery or any kind of interruption. He had just entered the prefects’ bathroom and there she was, reclining in the tub with water and bubbles up to her chin. She had added a *lot* of bubbles to the bathwater— they completely obscured her from the neck down, which he was sure she had done on purpose. He didn’t

mind. It was merely an added bit of anticipation... just imagining how she looked beneath the mounds of soapy froth was making him hard already.

And it was only ten-thirty at night.

And he fully intended to keep her til dawn.

She was his and his alone. For *hours*. Incredible. His heart was pounding and his mouth was dry.

Her eyes were closed— if he didn't know better he might have thought she'd fallen asleep in the bath. But when he'd come in her brows had knitted together just the tiniest bit... proving that she was aware of his presence and her refusal to look at him was intentional.

"Open your eyes, Granger," he said.

She did so. Such an ordinary color those eyes were. Plain, common brown. And yet at the moment he thought they were the most captivating eyes he'd ever seen.

"Does anyone know you are here?" he asked.

"No."

"Brilliant. Now stand up."

Slowly, she complied. And his jaw nearly dropped. Under the drifts of protective bubbles she had piled up all around her, she had been completely clothed in the water. The same blue jeans and turtleneck she'd had on earlier now clung, sodden, to her frame. She crossed her arms protectively in front of her chest.

"Well, I'll be damned," Draco said, momentarily stunned by this blatant display of defiance. "I never *did* tell you specifically to disrobe, did I?"

"No." Her voice was like lead.

Draco hardly knew whether to be furious, or amused. "Well I'm telling you now, mudblood. *Take. Off. Your. Clothes.*"

She did so, with jerky reluctance, stripping the blue turtleneck— nearly black, soaked as it was— up and over her head, and then peeling off the jeans— a task that involved much tugging, shimmying, and wriggling of hips. Draco very nearly lost it right there.

Hell if he was gonna lose it in his fucking pants, though... no, he was going to cum in Granger— again, and again, and again.

She reached behind herself, her hands going, he knew, to the clasp of her modest white bra... well, not so modest now, actually— it was, in fact, saturated to the point of being almost completely transparent. Her eyes were closed, her face again wearing that brow-knit expression she'd had when he'd come in. "Stop," he said abruptly, his voice little more than a croaky rasp.

She froze at this and her dark eyes flew open, locking instantly on his, carrying an expression of impossible hope. He smirked. "Don't delude yourself, Granger, I'm not letting you off *that* easy. It's just that I'd prefer to do the rest... myself."

She dropped her hands to her sides... dropped her head too; long tendrils of wet, dark hair falling across her face, obscuring it. Draco walked to the edge of the tub, stripping off his own shirt as he did so. Sinking into a cross-legged sitting position at the water's edge, he beckoned her over with an imperious gesture of his hand. "Come here, Hermione."

She did. Slowly. Coming to a halt mere inches from him, her head still bowed, her face still hidden.

"Sit down."

She began to fold herself into a sitting position beside him, but he caught her around the waist and pulled her toward him, catching her off-balance. She fell crossways into his lap with a little cry; his mouth immediately found the hollow where her shoulder met her throat, and he sucked on the soft, damp skin there the way a man who'd been wandering parched in a desert might suck down cool water from an oasis.

He ran his hands greedily over her body, taking her all in; he could scarcely get enough. She was shivering violently, he noticed— so violently that her teeth were actually chattering. Some of it, he surmised, was the shock of getting so abruptly out of a warm bath, and stripping off her clothes to boot— but he didn't think that was all of it, not by a long shot.

"Granger?" he said.

"Yes?" Her voice sounded faint. Her breaths were coming faster now, piling one on top of another.

"Turn to face me. No, not like that— straddle me. One leg on either side, good. Wrap your legs around my waist."

"Oh God," she whispered, and then did something that shocked him to the core... she threw her arms around his neck of her own volition, and dropped her forehead onto his shoulder, burrowing in beneath his chin. She was clinging to him like a child, and shaking like a leaf. Her face, pressed against his bare skin, felt feverish and hot.

"Oh God, please," she half-sobbed, her words muffled against him. "Malfoy... *please*."

"Please what, Granger?" he asked, lowering his head so that his lips were moving against her temple.

"Please... Malfoy... God... I'm scared."

"Granger..." he moved his lips until they brushed against her ear— darted his tongue out, playing with the tiny pearl stud earring that nestled there. "Hermione. You're a virgin, aren't you?"

She shuddered; a sudden and powerful spasm that wracked her body hard. When she answered him it was obvious that she was speaking through tears; she was practically choking on her words.

"Y-Yes! And I d-don't... want... to do this!"

"I'm sorry," he said, and he very nearly sounded it, too— the truth was, he was shaken... but not shaken enough to stop. "I'm sorry, Hermione, but you don't get a say in the matter. I've wanted this too goddamn long."

“But I don’t understand why,” she whispered brokenly, and then practically wailed, “why me?”

“Why you? Why *you*?” Draco raised both hands to grasp her by the temples, forcing her head up, making her look at him. “Do you think *I* wanted this, Granger? Do you? To be half out of my mind over a fucking *mudblood*? You’re barely fucking human, for God’s sake!”

She recoiled as if he had slapped her— tried to shake her head, to wrench it backward out of his grasp— but he was having none of it. His hands, already buried in her damp hair, clenched into fists— causing her to still immediately, and gasp with pain.

“Oh no you don’t,” he hissed. ‘You asked, and I’m telling you. I need you because you’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. That’s why you. You’re abso-fucking-lutely gorgeous, Granger. Don’t you know that? How can you not *know* that? “Hasn’t *Weasley*— (he sneered the name; fresh tears leapt to her eyes at the sound of it)— ever told you?’ When her only response was to bite her lower lip, he gave her a little shake.” Well? Hasn’t he?”

“No!” she cried. “Ron loves me, I know it! He shows me every day! But he doesn’t—” her voice dropped to a whisper— “he doesn’t tell me. No.”

Draco leaned in toward her until their foreheads clunked together. “And what would he show you if he walked in right now, Granger?”

Hermione gulped a deep breath and swallowed. “He’d show me what *you’d* look like, in pieces.”

Draco tilted her head back and planted a lingering kiss on her mouth, sucking on her bottom lip, biting it gently. “Good, *mudblood*,” he said a moment later when he came up for air, “you hold on to that thought. It may bring you some comfort while I’m fucking you six ways from Sunday. Now lie back— and keep your legs around my waist. Do it, Granger. *Right Now*.”

He stayed right with her as she shifted, sealing his lips to hers again, thrusting his tongue deep into her mouth; violating her, claiming her. He used one hand to cushion her head as it fell to the tile bathroom floor— the other was beneath her, unclasping her bra. He pushed the flimsy fabric up and over her breasts, freeing them, causing her to whimper into his mouth, without ever breaking the kiss. It was a long moment later that he levered himself up to have a look at the treasures he had just uncovered.

“Merlin’s balls,” he swore softly to himself, and then, to Hermione, who was staring fixedly up at the mosaic decorated ceiling, tears steadily leaking from the corners of her eyes to streak down her temples and lose themselves in her damp and snarled hair, “*lie still*.”

And catching her breasts in both his hands, he lowered his head to suckle greedily at first one, and then the other.

“Has Weasley ever done this to you?” He taunted several moments later, flicking lazily at her nipples, having tasted his fill— for now, at least.

“No.” Her voice was barely audible. She continued to stare straight up.

He unhooked her legs from his waist— pushed them wide apart— let one hand travel leisurely down, over her stomach which was trembling and heaving with her hitching breaths,

until at last it came to rest over the silken fabric of her panties— the last shred of clothing left on her body. She was so *hot* down there; the heat positively radiating out through the flimsy scrap of cloth. He pressed down with one finger; began to rub her through her knickers in slow, desultory circles. Her entire body jerked almost a foot off the floor.

“How about that?” he drawled.

“N-No!” she gasped, her hands clenching into fists, unable to do anything more without breaking his direct command to stay still. Draco rubbed her for a long time like that before finally stopping just long enough to hook his thumbs in the waistband of her panties and tug them down to her knees.

“Then he’s certainly never done *this*,” he observed in a cruelly mocking tone, as his finger resumed its previous activity, now directly on her skin. “Has he?” he pressed, when she didn’t immediately answer.

“No. Oh Malfoy, please no.”

In response he applied more pressure, his finger locating her entrance and dipping, just barely, in. “Oh my fucking God, you’re tight,” he murmured huskily. “Never had so much as a finger inside you, eh? Not even your own?”

“No,” she sobbed.

“Reckon you’d like to keep it that way, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes!”

“Too bad. There is one thing I’ll do for you though, Granger. Don’t move.” He pulled his wand out of the waistband of his pajama pants, pressed it gently against her lower abdomen, and muttered a rapid incantation.

“What was that?” Hermione asked, panic now clear in her voice. “What have you done to me, Malfoy?”

“Relax, it was only a contraceptive spell. Much as I’m going to enjoy tonight, I have no particular desire to *breed* with you... and I’m assuming the feeling is mutual. Why do you ask? How does it feel?”

“Warm,” she whispered. “Tingly. Strange. I... I don’t like it.”

“So you’d rather bear my child?”

“God, *no!*”

He chuckled a little at the vehemence of her answer. “Well... as I told you, the feeling is mutual, so good. Oh, and there’s one other little thing. There’s an aphrodisiac built into the charm as well. Consider it my gift to you, Granger. You’re going to enjoy this nearly as much as I am.”

This only served to bring on a fresh spate of tears.

“I don’t *want* to enjoy it! I want to g-go... upstairs... to b-b-bed!”

“Sshh.” He put aside the wand and stretched out full-length beside her, one hand resting possessively on her tummy, the other burying itself in the tumult of dark hair that fanned out about her on the floor. “You think too goddamn much, Granger, that’s your problem. By the time you go upstairs to bed the sun will be out and I’ll have fucked you in ten different positions. So deal with it.”

He lowered his mouth back to her nearer breast— the nipples were hardening now before his eyes, a result of the spell, no doubt. The hand that rested on her stomach traveled lower to resume its previous task for several long moments as the spell continued to work on her and she got wetter and wetter against her will... then, without warning, he plunged a finger deep into her.

She gave a little scream and her back arched like a bow.

“Malfoy! No! Oh... oh... nnuhhh...” she cried, tossing her head violently from side to side as he continued to debase her, now adding a second to the first. Her body was definitely reacting now; bucking up against his hand even as he knew her mind was screaming in protest. “Nnnnhh... oh... God... oh God, *stop!*”

“Not a chance,” he growled, releasing her breast from his mouth and leaning close over her flushed face, his fingers still moving inside her body. “Not quite the untouchable little bookworm anymore, are you, Granger? Now be a good girl and kiss me.”

He lowered his mouth to hers in a rough, possessive, lip-bruising kiss and she responded almost frantically, her hips now gyrating in rhythm with his hand even as tears continued to leak steadily from her closed eyes.

“God, you feel so good on my fingers,” he said hoarsely several minutes later, breaking the kiss. “I think it’s high time we took this... all the way.”

Those words were what brought on the true hyperventilation.

All of a sudden, what she was doing could hardly be classed as “breathing” at all— she was pulling deep, shuddering gasps of air in, and in, and in, but seemed unable to exhale again at all. She was choking— choking on her sobs and choking on her words as she begged desperately, futilely, for her virginity to be left intact.

Draco was actually brought up short for a moment as her entire body was wracked by a coughing fit brought on by inhaling her own tears.

“Granger.” He leaned over her once more, but here eyes were glazed now, unfocused; her anguish so great that for the moment she hardly seemed even to register him— the direct cause of it— right there above her. “Granger. *Hermione!* Damn it, pull yourself together.” He slapped her.

Perhaps this method of getting her attention was questionable, but it succeeded, and surprised her into breathing properly again.

“Well,” he said, a bit surprised himself, “I suppose that means we’re even for third year now.”

“If we’re even then you can let me go,” she said, but her voice was wooden; there was no hope in it now. She didn’t really expect him to let her go... which was just as well, since he

had no intention of doing so.

“Turn over,” he said, ignoring her comment completely. “Onto your stomach, Granger. Now.”

She did so immediately, not really having any choice in the matter. She folded her arms on the wet tile floor and buried her face in the protected little space they made. Draco pulled her panties the rest of the way down her legs until they dangled, forlornly, from one ankle; then, kneeling between her thighs, grabbed her by the waist and pulled her none too gently toward him— until her hips, slightly elevated now, bumped against his. He sucked in a sharp breath through clenched teeth, and finally undid his pajama pants, freeing an erection so intense as to be nearly painful.

Hermione shuddered all down the length of her body when he nudged just barely into her tightness— but he still didn’t take her, not quite yet. He continued to tease her instead, rubbing back and forth, and in tight little circles against her, while she bucked and twisted, panting, but unable to offer any real resistance— she was still under the Imperius Curse, which would not allow it. Draco smiled... for him, this was heaven. Merlin, it had been worth the wait, all the planning, the association with intoxicated house elves— worth it and more than worth it. This was bliss.

She was shaking her head back and forth, back and forth— it was still buried in her criss-crossed arms.

Draco had reached the end of his capacity for foreplay. He found his target and pushed in; an inch, then two. Hermione gave a muffled scream. He stopped.

“Granger,” he said quietly, “raise your head.”

She obeyed, but not by much. She lifted her head maybe an inch— her hair, now a complete, tangled mess, still obscured her face.

“Look at me,” he said relentlessly. “I want to see your eyes.”

She turned to face him over her shoulder, and slowly raised a shaking hand to push back the dark curtain of hair.

“Good girl,” he said, all mocking condescension. He began to rock his hips, each small thrust taking him just a fraction of an inch deeper, watching her eyes all the while. ‘You are so — fucking— beautiful,’ he told her in a rough whisper, “and you feel so good. And I want you to remember, mudblood— never forget— that this, right here and now, being fucked face down on the floor like filthy little whore, this is what you were made for, Granger. *This* is your place in the wizarding world.”

He was about a third of the way in now, when he bumped suddenly up against her hymen. She was biting her lip hard, whimpering deep in her throat. He stopped again; ran his hands all over her body for a long moment. “And what are you thinking right *now*, Hermione?” he asked her, almost gently.

She took a deep, shuddering breath— her eyes still had that unfocused look, and they were dilated now; they were *so dark*. He thought she might be going into shock.

“I... I... I want Ron... I wanted... wanted to give this to *him*!”

“But you’re not,” Draco said coolly. “You’re giving it to me.”

“No. *NO!* I’m not giving you *anything*, you’re *taking* it! You’re taking it away from me and I’ll never... get it... back!” Her breaths were starting to pile up again.

“Push back against me,” he said with brutal calm.

She froze, her entire body now trembling tautly as she fought this command with every fiber of her being. “No,” she whispered, “don’t... make... me... *please* don’t make me do that! Please, Malfoy, oh God please, rape me if you must but don’t make me— please don’t make *ME*—” Even so she was doing it; she couldn’t help herself.

Draco leaned over her, planted a kiss on her shoulder blade. “This isn’t rape, Granger,” he murmured, in a slightly affronted tone. “You’re going to cum as many times as I do.”

“I don’t want to *cum!* I want to go h-ho-*home!*”

“Sshhh.”

And he rammed himself the rest of the way in.

Chapter 3

He was staring at her.

Again.

On this of all nights, he really, *really* ought to be paying attention to his own date... but he could hardly help himself— he was just so surprised to see her here.

He never would have thought her capable of coming to the ball after the events of the night before. He had been true to his word; he'd marathon-fucked her until dawn, only releasing her once the sun was fully in the sky, and keeping her undergarments as a trophy of his conquest.

By all rights, she should hardly be able to walk straight right now, let alone waltz.

But then, she'd shown him on more than one prior occasion that she had reserves of strength he knew little about.

And now that she was here, clad in elegantly flowing dress robes of deepest forest green, how could he possibly be expected to give Pansy the consideration she deserved, when every glance across the room at Granger brought him a fresh and staggeringly powerful memory of the night before?

Of how she'd absolutely *wailed*— there was no other word that could accurately describe it— wailed when he'd slammed through her hymen and driven himself home, steadying her hip with one hand and plunging the other deep into her hair— winding the thick, dark locks around his fingers and *yanking*— forcing her to arch her back. She'd very nearly swooned with the shock of it then, as he'd commenced rutting into her with brutal short, deep, strokes.

Of the way her body had reacted entirely against her will as he'd continued, mercilessly, to use his fingers on her, flicking and grinding all the while he'd fucked her hard and long.

Of the way she'd fought that first aphrodisiac-induced orgasm— fought it more savagely than she had fought *anything* before— but in the end it took her anyway, her body bucking, and then stiffening, and then tightening unbearably around his cock as she shaken her head frantically— “No— no— oh... God... nuhh... please... ah— *ah— OHHHHH!*”

Of the broken-hearted way she'd sobbed the first time he'd spilled his seed inside her, pushed over the brink of his own orgasm by hers, crying out that she could feel his cum, that it burned.

Of the way he'd rested inside her after that first time, kissing and nuzzling and sucking at different parts of her body as he had first softened, and then hardened again within her... had begun to move once more, causing her to beg almost hysterically, *oh Malfoy please not again, please, I can't take anymore, you're h-hur-hurting me!* But her body, not being hers to control, had been moving with him even as she'd spoken, meeting him thrust for thrust.

Of the taste of her skin, the taste of her *tears*, the scent of her hair, the curves of her body as he'd taken her in one position after another— on her back, her side, her knees; inside the

bath, outside the bath, bouncing in his lap— making her cum right along with him each and every time, marking her with his mouth all over her stomach, her shoulders, her breasts.

Of how he'd talked dirty to her nearly the whole time, tormenting her with questions of what Weasley would think of her, if he could see her now... or *now*? At one point he'd wiped away the freshest flood of tears almost tenderly, and had confided to her in a gentle, reassuring tone that it was all right, really— Weasley was well accustomed by now to sharing his things.

Of the way he'd made her talk dirty *back*, forcing her to repeat words that he was sure had never passed her lips before nor ever would again— words she choked on; that it was clear were almost painful for her to say. And then, to add insult to injury, he'd made her *touch* herself too— showed her where and how to rub and then sat back and forced her bring *herself* to orgasm while he'd simply enjoyed the show.

Of the hopelessness in her eyes and the way he'd lifted the Imperius Curse from her after that, because he had judged her spirit to be finally, sufficiently broken, and how she'd continued to allow him to fuck her, and to fuck him back as well, just as he'd predicted— she had still been a prisoner of the aphrodisiac spell, after all.

Of how he had pulled her over to the ornate floor-to-ceiling mirror at one point and ordered her to watch herself get fucked, positioning her in such a way that she could see his cock driving in and out— and how she'd both cried, and cum, the hardest then.

Of the image he had in his mind of her returning to her room and her bed, once the pink morning light had been streaming in through the bathroom's leaded glass window, and he'd finally lifted the contraceptive spell and permitted her, shivering and exhausted and half-sick and beyond sore, to struggle back into her still-damp clothes; had performed a passable Disillusionment Charm on her to allow her to go unnoticed should any of her housemates already be awake.

He imagined her practically stumbling by the time she'd climbed the many stairs required to reach her tower room, grabbing at walls for support the way he'd seen her do outside the pub; falling onto her crimson-hung four poster bed and tugging the curtains closed around her, too tired and wounded to even make the effort of crawling under the covers; simply curling herself into a tight, hurt little ball in the middle of the bed, lying like that as the day passed her by, her thighs still sticky with his seed— God, he'd cum in her so much, *so much* — shaking, no tears left to cry, until she finally fell into a troubled, feverish sleep. He hadn't thought he'd see her around the school again before he left for the holidays.

And yet here she was. Subdued, to be sure; there was no question about that. But she had come to the ball, on Weasley's arm, and she looked positively enchanting. Her robes were so dark a color as to look nearly black when she was standing still... but ripples of green washed over them when she moved. She'd done something with her hair, but it wasn't up as it had been fourth year... it hung instead in loose curls halfway down her back, with tiny diamond-like gems scattered throughout the dark tresses, seemingly at random. They glittered almost aggressively in the dim light of the Great Hall. All in all, she took his breath away... and the thought that even as she danced with her boyfriend, it was *his* seed that still filled her belly, aroused in him an intense desire to take her all over again, coupled with a wave of fierce, perverse, possessiveness.

She was dancing with her face pressed against Weasley's chest, looking almost as though she were relying solely upon him to keep her upright. He obviously sensed that something was the matter, though he had no idea what. His face was troubled and he was holding her very tight— one hand stroking her hair in an absent yet soothing gesture. He dipped his head and whispered something— a question, Draco thought— into her ear. She shook her head against his shoulder— shook it without looking up. Ron frowned even more deeply.

Draco would have given a lot to know what it was he had asked her.

Reluctantly, he forced his eyes away, returning his attention to his own date, and his own friends. Still, he was peripherally aware of Granger throughout the course of the ball. She danced almost exclusively with Weasley, but there was a point where Potter cut in and danced an entire song with her while Ron went to pour drinks. It was clear that Potter also sensed something amiss— he was murmuring to her as well, pressing her to tell him what was wrong... but he was having no more luck than Weasley had.

Then several couples danced past in rapid succession, breaking Draco's line of vision— and when he could once again see Granger clearly, she had dropped her head to Potter's shoulder and her own shoulders were shaking— no, more than shaking, *heaving*; it was obvious, even from across the room, that she was sobbing almost hysterically onto Potter's dress robes. Draco's blood ran cold. Had she just told him what had happened?

Potter maneuvered her to a chair in the corner of the room; Draco danced Pansy in that direction, so as to continue keeping an eye on them. Granger collapsed bonelessly into the chair, dropping her face into her hands as Potter sank to his knees in front of her and gripped her by the shoulders, talking at her in a low, urgent voice. Draco couldn't make out the words. Weasley appeared at her side then, the drinks forgotten, looking absolutely sick with worry; he sat in the chair beside hers and gathered her into his arms, his eyes going to Potter, who said something terse and shook his head grimly.

His own date apparently forgotten for the moment, Potter took the chair on the other side of her, wrapping one of his arms about her in addition to both of Weasley's— leaning in to whisper continuously in her ear. Her distress was a nearly painful thing to witness, even for Draco, who had caused it. Still, several long moments later he was breathing easier again— she obviously hadn't told. There was not a doubt in his mind that had she told Potter and Weasley the truth, they would have attacked him by now— *killed* him if they could— right here in front of everyone. As it was, they hadn't so much as glanced his way. He was safe.

He turned his back on the trio and danced Pansy away again; he had to collect himself, and quickly. There was something he needed to do tonight, and it was very nearly time. He'd gotten the letter from his father just this morning at breakfast; it had contained detailed instructions, and an enormous, antique diamond ring. Draco had known that his parents had been in negotiations with the Parkinsons for several weeks already— though they were not as wealthy as the Malfoys, their lineage was pristine, and the match with Pansy was highly desirable to both parties. Apparently, an agreement had been reached at last that was satisfactory enough to Lucius that he didn't mind welcoming his future daughter-in-law into his home after, rather than before, the engagement officially commenced. So he'd "strongly suggested" that Draco propose immediately, and publicly, at the ball.

Sure enough, the music stopped, and he knew the time had come. He caught Pansy's hand in his and swept it to his mouth for a kiss, then turned and strode directly toward the stage, even as he heard someone— faculty member, performer, he didn't bother registering which; he didn't care— calling for silence and explaining that one of the seventh year students had a very special announcement to make.

XXX

Draco felt strangely detached as he mounted the risers to the stage. This was one of those life-defining moments; nothing would be the same after this. Nothing. He was about to pledge his life to Pansy Parkinson, and why? Because his parents, and her parents, had decided that such a match would be advantageous to both of their family names. Galleons, and lots of them, entered into it somewhere too, he was sure. It wasn't that he minded... he understood the logic of it all, and the fact that there were simply not all that many eligible young witches out there who could measure up to his family's high standards. Besides, he was... relatively... fond of Pansy; they'd been a couple for over three years now, and they'd been children together. He couldn't remember a time in his life that he hadn't known her. But did he love her? Well, he could learn to love her. His parents had had an arranged marriage, after all, and nobody could question their devotion to each other.

Still, this moment didn't feel the way he'd always imagined it would.

Merlin... if only Granger had been a pureblood.

If only.

But he stomped down furiously on that line of thought, even as he crossed the stage, breathing deeply and mentally rehearsing what he was about to say. Granger was not a pureblood. She was a mudblood and she may be beautiful and she may be the best fuck he'd ever had, but he had used her up and he was done with her and it was time to move on.

Let Weasley have his sloppy seconds.

Damn it, she was too fucking good for Weasley.

No. He had taken what he'd wanted. He was through.

Through.

The hush that has fallen over the hall was now complete. It was Showtime.

He sought out his date's eyes; she looked almost faint with anticipation, surrounded by a cadre of whispering, giggling Slytherin girls. "Pansy Parkinson," he said calmly, "you are the best thing that has ever happened to me. Would you do me the very great honor of becoming my wife?"

And why, *why* was he unable to resist, even at this critical moment, seeking out Granger just one more time? She stood framed in the double doors that led out of the Great Hall, sandwiched between Potter and Weasley, who looked as if they were supporting her on either side. Potter's date— the Weaselette— had joined them by this time as well, and it was obvious that they'd all four been in the process of leaving the dance.

But Granger had stopped, and turned back, and she met his eyes now. Her face was as white as a sheet and even from across the room he could see the silvery tracks her tears had

left, but she was not crying anymore. She returned his gaze steadily for a long moment, standing there backlit by the torches in the entrance hall, her robes shimmering from green to black to green again, and holy fucking shit, she was incredible, she was *glorious*— and Pansy was ascending the stage now, positively glowing, amongst rousing Slytherin applause, to accept his proposal and Merlin help him, he couldn't fucking tear his eyes off Granger.

Then she shook Potter and Weasley off, and turned her back on him, and walked away.

The double doors slammed shut behind her.

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He was staring at her.

Again.

It was the first time he'd seen her since the night of the Yule Ball... and that had been months ago.

He hadn't returned to Hogwarts after the winter holidays. Almost as soon as he'd arrived home, while a house elf had showed Pansy to her room and assisted her with settling in for her stay, his parents had sat him down and explained to him, almost apologetically, that open war was very nearly upon them— and that young men were required to grow up quickly in times of war. He would not be returning to school at all, they had decided; instead he would take the Dark Mark, begin his Death Eater training in earnest, and, of course, marry Pansy. Lucius had smiled and told him that “war weddings” had a long and proud tradition in the Malfoy family; that he and Narcissa had had one themselves, during the Dark Lord's initial rise to power.

It had seemed that they'd been bracing him against any possible disappointment he might feel at his newly altered lot in life, but he hadn't been upset at the prospect of leaving his Hogwarts days behind him. He had no regrets, no unfinished business there, since he'd succeeded in claiming Granger before he had left.

Still, if he'd thought he'd be able to wipe her entirely out of his mind once he'd fucked her, he found that he had been sorely mistaken. He'd thought of her often over the next few months, wondering where she was, what she was doing; was she training for combat as he was? Or still plaguing the house elves and obsessing over exams and marks in silly, useless subjects like History of Magic and Ancient Runes? Had Weasley tried to fuck her yet? Had she let him?

He thought of her on his wedding night, grabbing his bride by the hair (such disappointingly fine, straight hair) and pounding into her so hard that Pansy— who was not a virgin by any stretch— had cried out to slow down, he was hurting her.

He had thought of her, truth be told, nearly every single day... and now here she was, solid, right in front of him... and about to die.

XXX

Draco had returned to Hogwarts at last, barely a week before school was to let out for the summer holidays, as part of a Death Eater invasion force. They'd had the element of surprise

on their side, and had managed to gain access to the castle after dark, with a minimum of difficulty.

It was now nearly midnight, which was the time that had been appointed for withdrawal, if they didn't manage to actually take the building. The fighting had been raging through the rooms and corridors of Draco's former Alma Mater for hours. This wasn't meant to be the battle to end all battles... it was mostly about wreaking havoc on their enemies' morale. If they managed to actually capture the school, so much the better... but it was not the main objective, not tonight. This was merely the first stroke in what was intended to be a debilitating campaign of psychological damage. The only orders that had been handed down had been to try to avoid killing purebloods... excepting, of course, known blood traitors like the Weasleys. Half-bloods, mudbloods, and anyone offering any sort of active resistance was fair game.

Granger, who was both a mudblood and pretty much guaranteed to offer one hell of a lot of resistance, could hardly help but come out badly tonight. All in all, Draco was scarcely surprised at the predicament in which he found her.

She was badly outnumbered; a group of young Death Eaters led by Marcus Flint had her surrounded, backed up against a wall. Her own companions, Neville Longbottom, it looked like, and that ridiculous Lovegood girl— lay crumpled at her feet, either unconscious or dead. She was deflecting hostile spells from half a dozen directions at once, and even managing to fire off a few of her own in between— she was fighting fiercely, and brilliantly— but she was doomed all the same.

Even as he watched, Flint managed to get a curse through her defenses. Draco wasn't sure what it was, but it hit her in the stomach and it hit her hard. She doubled over... dropped her wand... fell to her knees. Flint aimed a brutal kick at the side of her head, which sent her sprawling to the floor. With what appeared to be a supreme effort, she rolled onto her back and wrapped both of her arms protectively over her midsection, where the curse had hit. Her breathing was shallow and labored. She paid no more attention to Flint or any of the others; just lay there staring straight up at the vaulted stone ceiling above her, waiting for the inevitable; waiting to die.

And as Draco watched Flint raise his wand again, a sudden thought crashed over him that was stunning in its intensity; as powerful as it was irrational.

NOBODY hurts Granger but ME.

Flint grinned. “Ava—”

“*Expelliarmus!*” Draco shouted, cutting Flint off mid-word, hurling him against the same wall Hermione had been backed up to, knocking him out cold. He then strode straight into the midst of the remaining Death Eaters to stand over Hermione's prone form, protecting her by his mere presence. “Lower your wands, you idiots,” he spat, and they did so, post haste— Draco commanded a great deal of respect among the younger Death Eaters; it was well known that he, like his father, was a member of the Dark Lord's inner circle— one of his most elite.

He glared around himself. “Have you lost your *fucking minds*? Have you any idea who this is? Have you stopped to consider that this is Hermione Granger, golden boy Potter's *best*

friend? Dead, she's useless to us— alive, she's a powerful bargaining chip. Now stand aside; I'm taking her to my father."

And he scooped her into his arms and walked away, as simple as that, stopping only long enough to toss a last command or two over his shoulder; "Get Flint back on his feet, and get your arses back into the fighting, *now!*" Behind him, he heard them scrambling to comply— heard a couple of peremptory *Avada Kedavra*'s fired off in rapid succession. If Longbottom and Lovegood hadn't been dead before, they were now.

He got down a long, deserted corridor and around a couple of corners before he stopped and looked down at the girl in his arms. Her eyes had fallen shut; her face was pale as wax. He wondered fervently what curse it was that Flint had hit her with. He shifted her so that her head clunked against his shoulder. "Granger," he said. No response. "Granger?"

He knelt and deposited her on the floor, propped in a semi-sitting position against the stone wall. "*Granger,*" he said insistently, tugging off his mask and hood as he spoke. This time her eyelids fluttered. She dragged her arms, which had been flung out to either side, in to cross over her stomach once more. She dragged her eyes open.

It took her a long time to focus clearly enough to recognize him, but he saw the exact moment it happened; saw the rush of despair in her dark eyes. "Malfoy," she croaked.

"Do you know what curse Flint hit you with?" he asked her brusquely. "Did you recognize it?"

She gave her head the barest little shake.

He lapsed into a long silence, thinking furiously. What the hell was he going to do with her? He knew damn well what he *wanted* to do with her— find a quiet, deserted spot, away from all the action, and heal her somehow, and then fuck her, and fuck her, and fuck her some more. But that was impossible. He couldn't just walk away from the battle. He couldn't heal her, either— it was obvious that there was something seriously the matter. And as for fucking her... well, *Merlin*, it was tempting... he could probably do it right *here* if he was quick enough; he was ready to go, no doubt about that...

"Malfoy," Hermione whispered. He snapped out of his reverie to meet her eyes again. He could tell immediately that she'd been thinking along the same lines he was.

"Don't," she said simply in a quiet, cracked voice. Slowly, she raised a hand to push a wayward curl of her hair out of her eyes. "Just kill me, all right? Don't... don't... hurt me again."

He opened his mouth, hardly knowing what he was going to reply— then stopped abruptly, arrested by something he'd just spotted on her hand. His eyes narrowed. "What the hell is *that?*" he demanded, and grabbed her hand out of the air for a closer look.

A pair of thin silver bands graced her fourth finger, the outer one set with a brilliant— though exceptionally small— diamond; the inner one was plain. It appeared that the Malfoys were not the only wizarding family that engaged in the tradition of short-notice war weddings.

Draco stared at them for a long time before raising his eyes back her face, wearing an expression of frank disbelief.

“Granger, are you fucking *married*? To WEASLEY?”

She tugged her hand free and stared for a long time down at the rings herself, almost as if she'd never seen them before... then slowly lowered her hand to cradle her stomach again. When she raised her eyes back to his, tears were standing in them. She tried to speak; failed; and then nodded her head, *yes*. She closed her eyes— two fat tears spilled over to trickle slowly down her face.

“Merlin, Granger, are you out of your head?” Draco exploded without thinking. “You may be a mudblood, but you’re still the most fucking beautiful witch I’ve ever seen! You could do better than... that... *that!*”

And she slapped him.

Hard, too, for someone who was meant to be seriously injured.

He raised a hand to his stinging cheek in utter, blank amazement. Hermione’s eyes were flashing with a completely unexpected fire.

“How dare you?” She said, in a low voice that shook with anger. “You know *nothing* about it, you foul... perverse...” she broke off, fighting for control of herself; swallowed hard. “Say what you want about me, Malfoy— *do* what you will to me, I can take it. But you leave... Ron... out of it, you hear me? You leave him the hell alone. Ron is... Ron... is... whoa.”

Her eyes suddenly slid out of focus again, and she listed to the side, beginning to slip from her half-sitting position toward the floor.

“Granger!” Draco grabbed her by the shoulders, hauled her upright again, gave her a shake. “What is it?”

Her eyes were falling shut. She swallowed thickly; moistened lips that looked, to him, painfully chapped, with her tongue. “Malfoy...” his name came out as little more than an exhalation. “I don’t know... hurts...”

Shit. Shit shit shit.

Draco was at absolute war with himself... and he would never, in his whole life, really understand exactly what compelled him to do what he did then.

“Shit.” His face settled into an expression of grim determination. “Granger. Where is Weasley?”

This got her attention. She forced her eyes to focus on his face once more. “No,” she whispered. “Leave him... Malfoy, leave him alone...”

“Goddamn it, Granger, tell me where he is! I want to take you to him.”

Incredibly, she cracked the tiniest of smiles. “You liar,” she breathed.

Draco’s jaw clenched, his teeth grinding together in an agony of frustration. It had nearly killed him to reach this decision— not to keep her for himself, not to keep her for his cause— and Merlin knew, she’d be an asset to his cause— God help him if the Dark Lord ever found out he’d had her and let her go— he’d have to tell everyone who’d seen him take her that he’d been ambushed and she’d been stolen back. It was the hardest decision he’d ever made

— it was putting his *own* arse on the line— he didn't even know *why* in Merlin's name he was doing it— well, except that once he handed her over to his Lord her fate would be out of his hands, and he didn't like that idea very much— and now she was *thwarting* him in it!

"Granger." He fought to keep his voice steady. It actually occurred to him at this point, distantly, that she probably didn't even answer to 'Granger' anymore... *hell* if he was going to start calling her 'Weasley', though. "I swear to you. If you make me go and *Imperio* your arse to get it out of you, I will not be held responsible for what else I may do. Now tell me where Weasley is and I will *take you to him*."

"Why?"

Well, that *was* the question, wasn't it? Why, indeed? But he was saved the need to answer it, as she chose that precise moment to pass out completely, her eyes rolling back and her body slumping; not an ounce of resistance left in it.

"No— *NO!* Granger, you little *bitch!*" Draco swore, even as he pulled her back into his arms with a bizarre tenderness. "What the fuck am I supposed to do now?"

He ran a hand through his tangled, sweaty silver-white hair, thinking hard. (He really *hated* what that fucking hood did to his hair.) Finally he picked up his wand, touched the tip of it to Hermione's wedding ring, and muttered a complex incantation, ending with the words, "Point me to Ronald Weasley."

He laid the wand flat in his palm and waited. Nothing happened for a long time— long enough for it to occur to him that it wasn't going to work and that was for the best anyway, because this was the most spectacularly stupid idea he'd ever had— and then it began to rotate, very slowly, in his hand. It was another long moment before it stopped, quivering slightly like the needle of a compass, pointing in what Draco fervently hoped was the right direction. Hoisting Hermione a little higher up in his arms, he couldn't resist the urge to press a lingering kiss to her chapped, unresponsive mouth, pushing his tongue just a little way in, sucking gently for a moment on her bottom lip. Then he started to walk.

It was no easy task, keeping one palm free and flat, his wand resting balanced on it, and carrying Hermione at the same time. He managed somehow, though, regardless of the fact that his mind was chanting in rhythm with his footfalls, *stupid— stupid— stupid*.

He found Ron, along with Harry, the Weaselette, Zacharius Smith, and a few others, in a small, unobtrusive ground-floor chamber that had apparently been set up as a makeshift war room. A fairly expert Disillusionment Charm had been cast on the door, but Draco was able to find it because, guided by his wand, he was actively searching for it.

Looking tired and careworn, dirty and bruised and as if they had only just stepped out of the fray themselves, Harry and Ron were bending closely over a small desk across which had been spread a mess of parchments; reports, charts, intelligence... all the same things Draco was accustomed to seeing his father pore over in Voldemort's much more comfortable and permanent command center. It occurred to him that it could be very valuable indeed to get a good, long look at some of the papers on that desk— even nick a couple if he could... but there was a more pressing matter on his mind at the moment. The matter of Hermione.

"Weasley," he said, "I believe I've found something that belongs to you."

Both Ron and Harry's heads jerked up at his voice, their eyes first widening, and then narrowing, in near perfect unison. Ron, whose eyes were fixed on Draco's face, and who had always been the more impulsive of the pair, snarled and lunged immediately for his wand— It was Harry whose eyes first actually took in the contents of Draco's arms.

His hand shot out to catch Ron by the arm.

"Wait," he said, in a low, intense voice. "Ron, *look*."

Draco saw the exact moment that Weasley registered just what it was that he was seeing. The color drained from the redhead's face in an instant, leaving him ghastly pale— his freckles now standing out in sharp contrast to his suddenly ill-looking skin. He actually staggered a little, catching himself on the edge of the desk. He looked as though someone had just sucker-punched him hard in the gut.

All this happened in the space of a couple of heartbeats. Then Potter said "Malfoy, what the *fuck* have you done?" at exactly the same time that Weasley, in a hoarse, nearly strangled voice, said, "I am going to fucking kill you."

Draco shifted Hermione slightly in his arms, shifting his own weight from one foot to the other at the same time. "I didn't do this to her, you sodding idiots," he said in a tone of sheer disdain. "Do you really think I'd have brought her here if I did? Now is one of you going to bloody well *take* her already? I don't have all night!"

Ron looked like he was about to fall to his knees. Still, he made no move forward. "Is this a trick, Malfoy?" he whispered. "A decoy... some sort of a... glamour... Polyjuice...?"

"No, Weasley, you poor, spotty bastard, this is your— *wife*, is it now?" (He sneered the word with utmost contempt)— "and she's very badly hurt. And as a married man myself, may I just say— if it were *my* wife I'd bloody well take her and *do* something about it!"

Ron still appeared paralyzed by shock, horror and doubt.

"*Stop acting stupid, Weasley!*" Draco very nearly shouted, now losing all patience. "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. This is the first, last, and *only* good deed I *ever* intend to do for you— so you had goddamn well better take advantage of it! If you value your— *wife*— at all, you'll take her and get her some medical help. *Take* her already, you fucking idiot!"

"Ron," Harry said quietly, "Ron, take her."

"But what if it's a trap—"

"Ron, what if it's *Hermione*? She needs help; *take* her."

At long last, Ron came around the desk, still appearing not quite steady on his legs, and reached out his arms. "All right, give her here, Malfoy." His voice was still suspicious, though, almost to the point of reluctance.

Draco took one last, long look down at Hermione's face. It was pale, and scratched, and dirty... but it was beautiful for all of that, and peaceful in unconsciousness. All of a sudden he keenly regretted bringing her here, and wanted desperately to hold on to her... the way she fit in his arms, the weight of her there; it was just so *right*.

But he couldn't hold on to her, and he knew it. He passed her over to Weasley, who gathered her up and immediately sank to the floor with her, cradling her crosswise in his lap. Draco remembered holding her almost the same way on the floor of the prefects' bathroom. The heat radiating off of her. Her voice, cracking with emotion. *Malfoy... God... I'm scared.*

The corners of his mouth wrenched violently down. He spun on his heel to leave.

"Malfoy, wait." It was Potter. Draco stopped, but he didn't turn back.

"Malfoy... you can't know what this means to Ron. To us. Thank you."

Draco snorted bitterly. *If you only KNEW*, he thought. He remembered the scent and the feel and the taste of her naked skin—the almost unbearable ecstasy he'd felt every time she'd orgasmed, bucking frantically against him, clamping down on his cock so hard that she'd *always* pulled him over the brink right after her—even as she'd cried out that no, she didn't want this, oh God, no. Merlin, it had been so fucking hot. And as long as she was alive and well somewhere in the world, there was *always* a chance that he could have her someday again. To fuck Hermione Granger had been damn good. To fuck Ron Weasley's wife... now *that* would be fan-bloody-tastic. *That* was why he had saved her. That was the reason.

Yeah.

"Don't thank me, Potter," he said. "Seriously. Don't. Oh, and you understand, I'll have to report the discovery of this room. I'd be out of here with those parchments, in five minutes, if I were you."

Harry said nothing more. Draco could hear Ron now, murmuring quietly, intently to Hermione. He imagined him stroking her hair the way he'd done at the Yule Ball, maybe shaking her gently, or cupping her cheek with his palm, running his hand over the contours of her face, her lips; planting a kiss on her forehead. He heard the word "*Ennervate!*" and a second later, Hermione's cracked voice whispering "Ron?" in a dazed sort of wondering disbelief.

He wanted so badly to turn around for just one final, fleeting glance... but he didn't do it.

He simply squared his shoulders, and walked on.

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He was staring at her.

Again....

The End